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TAGS: ASEC KE KISL KPAO PGOV PHUM

SUBJECT: COASTAL MUSLIM LEADERSHIP VIEWS: SHEIKH DOR

REF: NAIROBI 628

NAIROBI 00001150 001.5 OF 004

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Sheikh Dor, a vocal leader of Kenya's coastal Muslim community, harangues the USG and GoK, cites some legitimate grievances concerning biased treatment of his community by the GoK, praises the American people and threatens to disrupt the World Cross Country Championship in Mombasa. The coastal Muslim community represents six percent of Kenya's population. The Swahili/Arab component of the coastal Muslim community (about 60 percent) closely identifies with events in the Middle East, while the remainder of the community does not. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) PolCouns recently met with Sheikh Muhammad Dormuhammad (popularly referred to as "Sheikh Dor") in Mombasa. Sheikh Dor is the Secretary General of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK). He regularly chastises the U.S. and the Government of Kenya (GoK) for various "crimes" in his press statements and mosque sermons. Along with Professor Busaidy of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM), he is one of the most prominent Muslim community spokesmen in Kenya. Dor came to the interview armed with a large binder full of news clippings about alleged police abuse of Kenyan Muslims, the purported anti-Muslim bias of the GoK, and the supposed anti-Muslim agenda of U.S. foreign policy.

Dor Presents his Grievances

¶3. (SBU) Sheikh Dor made the following points:

-- Kenya's Muslims are a marginalized community, treated by the GoK and society in general as second class citizens or even as non-citizens. They must go to great lengths to receive their basic rights as citizens, such as provision of national identification cards, voter cards and passports, while those in the Christian community have no such difficulty. (Comment: This is a very common complaint by Muslims throughout the country. GoK officials usually do not deny it, but rather claim it is necessary since several Muslim-majority ethnic groups, such as Somali, Swahili, Borana and Arab, are transnational with ethnic communities in Somalia, Tanzania, Ethiopia and the Middle East. However, Christian-majority ethnic groups that are also transnational, such as the Luo, Maasai, Luhya or Taita, do not experience nearly as much difficulty obtaining official documents. End Comment.)

-- The Muslim community is prepared to work with the USG and

the GoK to find and arrest terrorist suspects if the USG and GoK would provide them with credible evidence. The GoK's Anti-Terrorist Police Unit (ATPU), with whom the USG works, arbitrarily arrests innocent Muslims. These police are not from the coast. They do not know us and we do not know them.

They make ignorant mistakes or act out of simple malice toward the Muslim community. (Comment: Arbitrary arrests of Muslim men is a very common complaint of coastal Muslims in general, not just the clerical leaders. Dor is correct that there are few Coast province natives among the police and even fewer coast Muslims. End Comment.)

-- The GoK detained 37 Muslim Kenyans they claimed had supported the Islamic Courts in Somalia and then sent them to Somalia and Ethiopia to be interrogated and imprisoned, ignoring orders from Kenyan courts for them to be released or charged. If they broke Kenyan law, then let them be tried here. Other foreigners linked to the Somali Islamic courts were deported to their home countries. Only Kenyans were treated in this way. It is further proof that the GoK does not consider Muslims full citizens worthy of protection. "I ask that the U.S. Embassy help to get our people back." (Comment: The number of transferees is 17 at most, and it is not sure that all these are truly Kenyan citizens. The GoK has now agreed to request the Somali authorities to return any transferees who can prove Kenyan citizenship. Dor sits on the GoK-appointed committee to resolve this issue. End Comment.)

-- Once arrested, our men are interrogated by the FBI and CIA. What business do they have interrogating Kenyan citizens? Is this America? We may be Muslim, but we still have our rights as Kenyan citizens living in Kenya. (Comment: It is widely believed in Mombasa that all arrests of Muslim men, even if seemingly for criminal offenses not related to terrorism, is at the specific instruction of "the FBI and the CIA," who then participate in the interrogations.

NAIROBI 00001150 002.5 OF 004

This myth is very difficult to dispel. It is based on the fact that FBI agents did indeed provide extensive investigatory assistance to the Kenyan Police in the aftermath of the 1998 Embassy Nairobi bombing and the 2002 tourist hotel bombing outside Mombasa. That limited period of intense cooperation has been mythologized into a tale of continuing direct supervision by USG agents of Kenya's anti-terrorist police on the coast. Diplomatic Security's Anti-Terrorist Assistance program provides some training to ATPU. End Comment.)

-- We know that the ATPU is no more answerable to Police Commissioner Ali than was the special squad used to raid the Standard newspaper. The GoK has put the ATPU under the control of the U.S. embassy. (Note: In March 2006 masked Kenyan police raided the Standard media house. This action was taken without the approval of Police Commissioner Hussein Ali. In the aftermath of the public outcry against this police action, Ali fired his deputy who had organized the raid. End Note.)

-- Dor made all the usual points from an anti-American Muslim perspective opposing USG policy in Israel, Afghanistan and Iraq. He said that "after 9/11 we were all very sympathetic toward America, but of course later we learned the whole truth of 9/11 as your own people have revealed." Dor then recited delusional conspiracy theories about 9/11 developed on various web sites. He went on, "at first we believed that you were fighting back against terrorists, but then we came to realize you were making war against Islam because only the Muslims can prevent America from achieving worldwide domination." (Comment: Dor emphasized the American origin of his 9/11 conspiracy theories. The "9/11 Truth Movement" has made an enthusiastic convert on the Kenyan coast. The U.S. mission will seek to correct the perception of this issue among audiences reached by Dor and others using materials developed by the Department's International

Information Programs. End Comment.)

A Need for Increased Dialog

¶4. (SBU) PolCouns stressed to Dor that there is a need for regularizing and intensifying dialog between the U.S. Embassy and Mombasa's Muslim leadership. This in fact is among the main reasons the USG plan to re-open a consulate in Mombasa. The purpose of the dialog is to clear up mutual misunderstandings and incorrect information and perceptions as well as to frankly discuss real points of disagreement about U.S. foreign policy. Successful dialog would identify points of agreement and potential cooperation. Dor said that he knew of the USG's intention to re-open its consulate in Mombasa. He welcomed that development as a means of furthering dialog, "along as the consulate is not staffed by the FBI and CIA and is not used as a base to harass and oppress us."

¶5. (SBU) PolCouns challenged Dor to express what his organization supports, as his statements in the press only list what CIPK is against. He took the point, but said that the press often mischaracterizes his views. PolCouns rejected Dor claims that USG policy is anti-Muslim, pointing out actions on behalf of persecuted Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo and on behalf of Tsunami victims in Muslim Indonesia. PolCouns also pointed out that whatever the present day difficulties in Iraq and Afghanistan, the prior regimes in those two states had murdered a great number of Muslims and had misruled and oppressed their people. PolCouns asked Dor if CIPK had ever denounced Sudanese policy in Darfur as it had USG policy in Iraq. Dor claimed that in fact he had publicly challenged Sudanese representatives at "international fora" he had attended to justify their Darfur actions. "But in Kenya, I focus on the domestic issue of police abuse of our people." (Comment: Dor's domestic focus does not prevent him from regularly castigating the U.S. for its policies in the Middle East. End Comment.)

Threatened Disruption of World Cross Country Championship

¶6. (SBU) PolCouns asked Dor about statements that the Muslim leadership in Mombasa will seek to disrupt the International Cross Country Championships scheduled to take place on 24 March unless the GoK releases Muslim detainees in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia. Dor said "I was among those who lobbied internationally to get the championship in Mombasa. We know this event can bring needed resources to our

NAIROBI 00001150 003.5 OF 004

neglected community. But how can we allow it to go on now that our brothers have been deported and exiled to Somalia and Ethiopia? We can not sit still as this injustice continues, just as you do not sit still when your people are abused." Asked about the nature of the "disruption," Dor replied cagily that it will include demonstrations and other protest actions to ensure that the GoK "does not ignore us." Dor declined to be more specific than that. PolCouns reminded Dor that he had earlier denounced the U.S. Embassy travel warning as an "unfriendly act against Kenya," pointing out that the press statements about his organization's intent to disrupt the games was potentially very damaging to Mombasa's tourism industry. Dor reacted angrily, stating that "unlike you, honor and respect is more important to us than money." (Comment: Earlier that day, Mombasa Muslim business leaders had expressed to PolCouns their frustration with their community's clerical leadership. They regretted that the clerics "are responsive to their friends and financial backers in the Middle East, not to us." End Comment.)

¶7. (SBU) Dor emphasized numerous times that he has respect and affection for the American people, but detests American foreign policy. He recounted his wife's recent trip to the

U.S. to visit her American resident sister and the glowing reports she gave of the thriving American Muslim community she encountered there. At the same time, he reached for every rhetorical stick with which to beat the USG. At one moment he asked what right the USG had to appoint itself as the world's policeman, while at the next moment he complained that the USG had not intervened in Rwanda during the genocide. His manner was intense, nervous and a bit irrational, while also at times kindly and avuncular.

Provincial Police Officer Kingori: The Games will Go On

¶18. (SBU) Provincial Police Officer Kingori told PolCouns that the Muslim community threats concerning the cross country championship were all bluster and posturing. He summed up their stance as "violent words, but peaceful actions." He expressed frustration with the Muslim leadership demands. "How can I stop doing things I am not doing? How can I release detainees who do not exist? Most of their complaints are imaginary!" Kingori, a Christian from central Kenya, arrived in Mombasa in late 2006 from his previous posting in Nairobi. He acknowledged that he was still learning the ways of the coast. His take on the Muslim leadership was derisive. "You know these Swahilis and Arabs only marry their cousins in order to keep wealth and land within the family. You can see the effects of in-breeding in their erratic and irrational behavior." Kingori then laid out his security plans for the cross country games and expressed the strong conviction that his force can maintain security for the event.

A Note on the Coastal Muslim Community

¶19. (U) Coastal Muslims make up approximately 60 percent of Kenya's Muslim population and 6 percent of Kenya's overall population. They account for approximately 50 percent of the population of Coast province. This community is ethnically mixed and divided amongst competing sects and moderate to radical tendencies. These various ethnicities, sects and tendencies often unite when they feel their community's interests are directly threatened, although they contend against one another for leadership positions in mosques and Muslim associations. Coastal Muslims dominate leadership positions in Kenya's two main Muslim associations, SUPKEM and CIPK.

¶10. (SBU) Muslim religious leaders on the coast, especially at senior levels, are largely drawn from the Arab and Swahili communities, who together make up about 60 percent of coastal Muslims. The remaining 40 percent are Muslims from Christian-majority Bantu ethnic groups, mostly Mijikenda and Pokomo. There is a pronounced division within the coastal Muslim community between the Arab/Swahili camp on one hand, with its middle east connections and preoccupations, and its clerical leadership's strident, grievance obsessed public posture, and the rest of the community who tend to be much more moderate in their rhetoric and are much more concerned about domestic issues than they are about American foreign policy.

Comment: Some Legitimate Grievances Amidst All the Angst

NAIROBI 00001150 004.6 OF 004

¶11. (SBU) Kenyan society and officialdom, for the most part, clearly perceive Kenyan Muslims as second class citizens or not as true citizens at all, and treat them as such. Complaints that Kenyan Muslims experience much greater difficulty in obtaining official documents than do their Christian fellow citizens are widespread and credible. Relations with the coastal Muslim community could be improved by public advocacy of the principle of equal treatment for all citizens under the law. We will include this theme in

our public statements.

¶12. (SBU) Policing on the coast would be more effective if more members of the force were native to the region. We have raised this issue with senior police officials in the past, however, current GoK policy is not to assign police to their home districts so as to avoid conflict of interest and to discourage corruption.

¶13. (SBU) Additionally, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), a government watchdog organization, is charged with investigating complaints of human rights abuses.

Greater cooperation and transparency between provincial police and the KNCHR could help to mitigate coastal Muslim,s concerns about abuse of police power perpetrated against their community. We will follow up with KNCHR leadership on this point.

RANNEBERGER